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## The Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors

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theory, Herrick's evidence persuasively suggests that there was no single factor that induced Soviet shipbuilding more than the fear that America might surge too far ahead in the naval arms race of the 1980s. The Reagan "600-ship Navy" was all the ammunition Gorshkov needed to lay the keel of his first real aircraft carrier. Ironically, however, Gorshkov's winning campaigns against the Soviet defense bureaucracy helped bankrupt the Soviet Union.

This study is designed for the specialist. It is not easy to read. It is overly long (1,415 pages)—it quotes, paraphrases, and synthesizes too many articles and editorials found in Soviet newspapers and journals from over the thirty-year period. Herrick is comfortable in this terrain and appreciates the way Soviet leaders conducted their strategic debate, helping the reader to understand the hidden (and sometimes contradictory) messages they made. He is particularly good at helping readers "split the hairs" of the debate, noting the shifting doctrinal priorities from year to year, which few laymen could discern. However, he repeatedly revisits such central topics of strategic debate as command of the sea, homeland defense, and sea-lane attack. Few readers will have the patience to follow.

TOM FEDYSZYN  
*Naval War College*



Hornfischer, James D. *The Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors*. New York: Bantam, 2004. 499pp. \$14

James D. Hornfischer writes a gripping novel of the U.S. Navy's last major surface engagement of the twentieth

century. The battle described here is the engagement between Task Unit 77.4.3 "Taffy 3" under the command of Rear Adm. Clifton "Ziggy" Sprague and the Japanese Center Force under Vice Adm. Takeo Kurta, charged with ultimately halting Gen. Douglas MacArthur's Leyte invasion force. By October 1944 the war in the Pacific seemed well in hand, yet the Japanese navy still posed a threat.

From the first line in the book, "A giant stalked through the darkness," the reader is caught up in life onboard a World War II ship. Hornfischer begins his story with a desperate Japanese fleet. The Japanese carrier force is virtually ineffective because of the severe loss of planes and, to a greater extent, the loss of pilots to fly them. The remaining Japanese strength resides in its battleships—two of the largest ever built, assigned to the Japanese Center Force—*Yamato* and its sister ship *Musashi*. Hornfischer describes the battle that took place in the morning hours of 25 October 1944 between the overwhelming firepower of the Japanese Center Force and the relatively slow and poorly armed Taffy 3.

The tone is set with carefully provided background on the ships of Taffy 3 and their crew while the combat information centers and radio shacks try to work out the puzzle of random reports flowing in. At the same time, a significant portion of American firepower, the U.S. Third Fleet, under Adm. William F. Halsey, is rapidly steaming north in hot pursuit of the remaining Japanese carrier fleet. This deception move, which was part of the Japanese strategy, worked as it was designed—it essentially took Halsey out of the fight.

Around sunrise the Japanese Center Fleet, twenty-three ships in all, transited through the San Bernardino Strait, passing between the southern end of Luzon and the northern part of Samar Island. They met with the thirteen ships of Taffy 3, comprising six small escort carriers, three destroyers, and four destroyer escorts. By rights, Taffy 3 should have been annihilated; however, the fog of war loomed large. The Japanese tactical picture was so confused and blurred by misinformation, inadequate reconnaissance, and poor communication that the Japanese broke off the attack late in the morning and left the battle to the north.

Hornfischer uses the majority of the book to describe, in amazing detail, events as the battle unfolded.

Hornfischer's detail is eerily precise. He thoroughly provides a play-by-play action including the formations and actual intentions of each commanding officer. However, Hornfischer carefully did his homework, interviewing countless survivors and reviewed hundreds of documents in order to piece together details of that morning off Samar.

*The Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors* is a must read for anyone interested in naval history.

DAN DUSEK  
*Commander, U.S. Navy*



Smith, Starr. *Jimmy Stewart: Bomber Pilot*. St. Paul, Minn.: Zenith, 2005. 287pp. \$21.95

The defining era of actor Jimmy Stewart's life was his service in the air force, according to his biographer, Starr Smith, who served with him in the Eighth Air Force during World War II. This biography deals mainly with that period of

Stewart's life. The theme of the story is how a man approaching middle age joined the armed forces at the lowest grade possible and in only four years rose to the rank of "bird colonel." This accomplishment was carried out not through favoritism but through hard work, technical competence, and leadership.

A famous actor at the beginning of 1941, Jimmy Stewart was about to take on the biggest challenge of his life: flying bombers in the U.S. Army Air Corps. He was born James Maitland Stewart in Indiana, Pennsylvania, in 1908. At an early age he developed an interest in aviation that stuck with him all his life. He was a student of Princeton University, where he found his other interest—acting.

When France fell to the Nazis in 1940 and Britain was battling for its life, Stewart concluded that the United States could no longer avoid the war. Not soon after, his draft notice arrived and he was sworn in as a private. He was already an accomplished pilot and so he was accepted for flight training.

Jimmy Stewart was assigned to a B-24 squadron slated for transfer to the Eighth Air Force to train in Iowa, where he excelled to become squadron commander and then was promoted to major. He flew twenty missions, many of them in hotly contested air space. When the war in Europe ended, he was a wing commander whose job became one of deactivating the wing and bringing the men home.

There are a few minor quibbles that an editor would have caught. The early chapter on Eisenhower seems unnecessary, and much of the end material that deals with the careers of some of Stewart's